

# The very real horror.

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TV: The Woman in the Wall

BBC 1

The nights are drawing in, and autumn is an ideal time for scares. However, *The Woman in the Wall*, BBC 1's new 6-part drama series, is horrific on various levels. This psychological thriller explores the very real horror of the [Magdalene Laundries](#) and the far-reaching impacts of abuse and trauma on both the survivors and the wider community. Set in the fictional Kilkinure, a small Irish town, with the apparently close-knit community complicit in turning a blind eye to the atrocities on their doorstep.

Lorna Brady (Ruth Wilson) is a spiky, brittle protagonist, an outsider that the town regards with equal parts pity and suspicion. She is difficult to like, erratic and unapologetically confrontational, but still seemingly surrounded by friends and neighbours who watch out for her. She is an unreliable narrator, a sleepwalker who commits reckless, often violent, acts while apparently unconscious (Kopelman 2022). Things quickly spiral further out of her control when Lorna finds an unknown dead woman in her home, with no recollection of what happened. As the story unfolds, we learn that Lorna has been traumatised by being forcibly confined as a young teen in the unacknowledged mother and baby home run by a local convent. A subplot, following a campaign by a handful of affected women advocating for the state to recognise the 'Training Centre' as one of the Magdalene Laundries, almost casually highlights the types of abuse she suffered. Finally, a murder investigation brings Colman Akande (Daryl McCormack), a big city detective, to the sleepy town and to the realisation that this case hits all too close to home for him.

The storytelling is frenetic and often initially confusing, disconcerting mixes of flashbacks and (possibly literal) ghosts of the past plague the sleep-deprived Lorna until she, and the viewer, has to continually question if what we are seeing is actually real. At the time of writing, the series finale is still to air, and it is hard to see how the various twists and turns piled on each week can be effectively resolved. Perhaps the point is that they can't be. Regardless of how neatly the finale manages to wrap things up, the story is gripping and brings a still raw real-life scandal to light. At its heart it is a harrowing treatise on the long-ranging effects of trauma, stigma and grief.

While Kilkinure, Lorna and The Sisters of the Seven Joys convent are fictional, in reality the Magdalene Laundries were essentially workhouses for young women. Often sent by their families or the state due to behaviour seen as 'sinful' or immoral, but may have included minor crimes, mental health issues or the effects of abuse (O'Rourke, O'Mahoney & O'Donnell, 2021). Shockingly, this was not a scandal from the distant past; the last one closed in 1996, and the former Taoiseach Enda Kenny [issued an apology on behalf of the state in 2013](#). Other films have explored this subject area, most notably [Philomena](#) in 2013, but it is still relatively unknown outside of Ireland. It is a story that needs to be shared and acknowledged, and *The Woman in the Wall* will undoubtedly introduce the source material to a wider audience.

(535 words)

References

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